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ABSTRACT

This theme issue on the role of networking in improving services for gifted individuals presents two feature articles and several regular columns. "A Network of Scholars" by Jerry Flack describes efforts of a group of professional educators and researchers of gifted persons in Colorado who worked cooperatively to create the Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative, with the purposes of service, professional growth, and competence validation. "The Courage To Network" by Maddi Wallach lists the characteristics of gifted adults, outlines the emotional impact of a gifted lifespan, and discusses the value of networking for adults, with the goals of supporting each other and educating schools and the public about the existence of this misunderstood population. Richard W. Ronvik responds to a critique by John Feldhusen that appeared in EC 303 441, concerning use of terminology such as "gifted" and "talented" and use of intelligence and achievement tests in identifying gifted children. Regular columns present information on the moral gifted child in a violent world; the innocence of childhood; networking among students, parents, and teachers; literature resources; asynchrony in adults; essential tools and skills for networking; and the role of Internet in networking. (JDD)

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# UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED®

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

January—February, 1994

Volume 6, Issue 3

## A Network of Scholars

**Jerry Flack, Ph.D.**

Colorado is among the many states in the nation without endorsement or certification for educators who specialize in meeting the learning needs of gifted, creative, and talented students. For more than two decades, educators in the state have tried unsuccessfully to bring forth a state department of education endorsement to affirm and validate the training, research, and work experience many educators of gifted learners possess. So, we finally took matters into our own hands and developed a proactive stance on professional recognition. Admittedly, professional training and practice do not automatically guarantee educational excellence. Nevertheless, these experiences increase the possibility that practitioners have developed fundamental knowledge and skills related to serving these students and are aware of the most effective practices for meeting their educational and psychological needs. Moreover, endorsement provides reward and professional recognition for the hard work, individual effort, and service of master teachers.

In May, 1992, a small group of professional educators and researchers of gifted persons in Colorado met to

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FOCUS ON:

**NETWORKING**

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## The Courage to Network

**Maddi Wallach, M.A.**

### *Adult Characteristics of Giftedness*

Many highly gifted individuals reach adulthood without even knowing they are gifted because this population is not well understood or accepted by society in childhood or adult life. The characteristics of highly gifted adults are not what most people associate with giftedness. In addition, many of these characteristics are not prized by society or well-suited to the social norms of either childhood or adult institutions.

For example, a child who is chronologically seven but functions with a mental age of 12, and, on occasion, the emotional age of five, is a problem for the school system. A university professor who questions the basic assumptions of her field, who is morally outraged by the competitive pecking order in her department, and who cannot express her ideas without becoming emotional, will be considered an unprofessional fringe element.

*Understanding Our Gifted* has explored the characteristics and internal experiences of gifted children, and has recognized the importance of

*(Continued on page 11)*

EC 303442

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# FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings from Down Under!

We are excited to report that the concept of giftedness as "asynchronous development" has received enthusiastic international endorsement from as far away as Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia! In this issue, Maddi Wallach advances the concept further with a look at asynchrony in adults, and the necessity for gifted adults to network with each other. Maddi asked a gifted young woman with whom she works, *"How does your giftedness manifest?"* The woman responded, *"Empathy. I feel other people's pain so deeply and the pain of the world so deeply that sometimes it's disabling."* Empathy, moral sensitivity and intensity appear to be critical markers of giftedness. In her column, Dee Lovecky describes how this moral sensitivity is compromised by *"the media blitz promoting violence as the only way to solve all problems."*

From the wonderful feedback we have received from our subscribers, as well as the positive reception of audiences throughout the world, it is evident that our focus on the inner experiences of the gifted resonates deeply with many individuals. Referring to Martha Morelock's article, "Giftedness: The View from Within," in the January, 1992, issue of *UOG*, Kathy Courchene writes:

*Many of the issues that Ms. Morelock raised struck a responsive chord in me... I no longer think that I am "wrong" or that I am "crazy," thanks to folks like you and Ms. Morelock who have published so much about what giftedness is, and what it means.*

Please see "Personality Plus" (p.7) for more excerpts from Kathy's letter. Letters like this give us at *Understanding Our Gifted* the strength to keep on going. Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to dialogue with us. We need to hear from you.

This issue is a response to previous letters asking for advice on how to network. In Jerry Flack's lead article, professionals in the field will discover an exciting new model for networking with each other. Many of our regular columnists echo this theme, providing concrete ideas on how students, parents, and educators can connect with each other in person and via computer networks. Why not start an Internet file on Asynchrony and see what happens? Let us know!

We also have a reaction from Rick Ronvik to John Feldhusen's rejoinder, printed in the last issue. And so the dialogue continues. We hope you will become an active part of that dialogue in your own community. And keep those letters coming!

*Linda Silverman*

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*Deirdre V. Lovecky*

# IDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

## The Moral Gifted Child in a Violent World

The literature suggests that young gifted children show unusual moral sensitivity and compassion for their ages. For example, Silverman (1993) described 2 1/2 year old Sara Jane, who volunteered her piggy bank and later her Christmas gifts for needy people. Roeper (1988) has long reported on moral concerns of gifted children ranging from unfairness and injustice to worries about peace, the environment and other world concerns.

My own work with gifted children also suggests unusual moral and social concerns. Both boys and girls worry about war, the environment, the homeless, poverty, crime and drugs. And yet, for many gifted boys, there is also a fascination with violence. These boys do not see the connection between the toys and games they want which encourage violent play and their later actions. The gifted child takes no more responsibility for the occurrence of violent actions than does a more average child. In fact, many of the gifted boys I have questioned see violence as the only solution to interpersonal conflicts.

Both the influence of peers and of the media around them appear to place gifted children, particularly boys, in conflict with their inner most feelings and judgments. To continue with the generous, compassionate and altruistic responses of early childhood places many gifted boys at considerable risk for peer rejection and ridicule. They are too vulnerable this way, so they often conceal the moral side of themselves behind the same invulnerability modeled for them by others; that is, they wall off and deny compassionate responses to others. Familiarity with media heroes makes it easier to laugh at pain, to go along with intolerance, to learn to tease others and to try to fit in. One is not teased if one is able to recite the entire plot of a gruesome movie or tell all the jokes from Beevus and Butthead's latest episode.

In America we value freedom from censorship so highly that we place it ahead of all other values and moral principles; instead, we should see it as one of a set of values we need to balance when dealing with young minds that have not yet the maturity to resist pressure to conform. Denison (1993) points out that, in Finland, children are valued so highly that in 1990 the Finns banned a McDonald's commercial because it exploited the loneliness of children. Yet, in this country children have few resources to deal with the media blitz promoting violence as the only way to solve all problems. Even gifted children fall heir to this legacy.

Helping gifted boys to deal with the problem of media pressure and the consequent pull towards aggression and violence means helping them first define that there is inner conflict between what they feel about moral issues and how they see others and themselves behaving. Second, parents and teachers of gifted children need to talk directly about the issues of fitting in, being rejected for one's beliefs, and making decisions about actions based on moral beliefs and not just on conformity to a media model. Third, parents will have to be courageous and say "no" to some toys, games, television shows and movies. If we expect children to resist pressure and define moral concerns, we need to provide them with role models who think out these issues themselves. Parents cannot just assume that anything children view is all right if we view it with them; children see things not with our adult eyes, but with their own immature, media-conditioned and fearful eyes. Finally, we need to give all children better models for interpersonal problem solving. There are curricula developed by peace organizations, such as The War Resister's League, which stress nonviolent solutions to life problems. Investing in them should be among a school's priorities.

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**Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D.,** is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island, and a frequent author of articles on giftedness in children and adults.

*Annemarie Roeper*

# PARENTING

## The Innocence of Childhood

Children, especially gifted children, know when they are being deceived. They also know when they are expected to go along with the deception. Most know that they are expected to believe in Santa Claus or the "Tooth Fairy," and to be thankful on Thanksgiving. But some wonder, *"Must I be thankful when my cousin comes to visit on Thanksgiving and destroys my toys?" "Are homeless children thankful?"* These are questions thought about by children, but not often asked.

Many adults try to protect their children from the truth in order to maintain the "innocence of childhood." Children go along with the game, but it makes them feel lonely and deeply suspicious. Without intending to, we often tell our children how to think and feel: *"You must be grateful"; "You must love your siblings"; "Don't worry, everything is fine."* We act as if we could make these things true simply by saying them out loud. Gifted children, whose intuition works overtime, know there are many complex situations, thoughts and feelings that are not positive. But the child feels prohibited from feeling them, let alone expressing them, and may develop guilt feelings over negative thoughts.

A five-year-old girl once told me that her aunt and uncle would not tell her that her parents had been injured in a car accident, but she knew something was very wrong. *"It was so scary because no one told me what was going on. I just knew something was wrong. I even felt better when they finally told me that my Mom and Dad had been hurt in a car accident."*

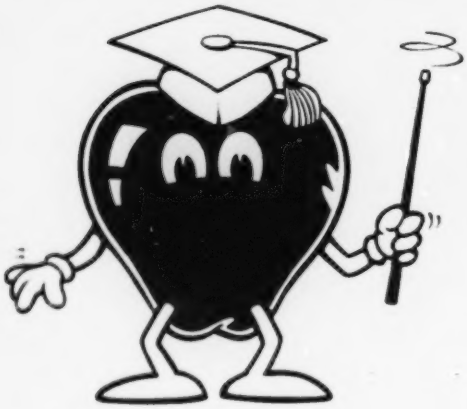
One of humanity's best developed skills is denial. This is true for nations as well as individuals. We have denied our mistreatment of the Indians; Germans do not teach their children about the holocaust, and some deny it ever happened; we pretend that families feel loving toward each other every moment. It may appear to be the only way we can cope with our personal problems or the enormous problems of the world. But even those of us who value honesty and awareness often "shield" children from the truth. It is as though we believe the world is so filled with problems that we must create a make-believe world for our children. Our intention is to preserve their trust for as long as possible, but the lesson they learn is actually *distrust*. The child senses the deception and, not knowing what is being withheld, fears the worst.

Is the "innocence of childhood," then, a myth? No, it definitely exists, and it is magnified in the gifted. We find it in those children who have been dealt with truthfully. There is immense safety and comfort in truth. Children can relax in the bond of trust that comes with being included in the world of the adult—even if it is painful. They lose their innocence only when they are exposed to deception. And only when they know the difference between truth and fantasy can they use their imaginations without fear.

Does that mean we have to give up Santa Claus? Not necessarily. The gifted understand and enjoy at an early age the meaning of symbols. Santa Claus as a symbol of goodness and peace is a comforting thought for them. But if they choose not to believe, that choice also needs to be supported.

Since I am writing this during the holiday season, I would not let the opportunity go by to wish you a good New Year and to express my hope that we can create a world which will allow our children the innocence of childhood.

**Dr. Annemarie Roeper** is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, ***Educating Children for Life.*** Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the ***Roeper Review***, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.



# INSTRUCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Networking is a critical, often overlooked, component of the education of gifted students. An important realization for gifted children is that, while they are very different from many of their classmates, some other people are of like mind, and rewarding, exciting intellectual and emotional interactions are possible. The difference a single intellectual peer can make in the self-concept and general attitude of a gifted child should not be underestimated. This one factor can change personal outlook, academic achievement and direction from negative or non-committed to positive and pro-active.

Networking ideally occurs at three levels: among students, parents, and teachers. I will consider each of these levels and how networking can be accomplished by each group.

From a very early age, gifted children need to be led to establish and nurture ties to other gifted persons, preferably near-age peers. A major problem, of course, is *finding* another gifted child with whom the child relates and who, therefore, is a possible connection. The effort parents and teachers at the preschool level make to foster early connections will be well rewarded. Getting to know the parents of other gifted children is necessary, and probably is best done through a parent advocacy organization. As children enter and progress in school, potential friends may be found through pursuit of interests such as music or chess, or, occasionally, in school classes, clubs, or other extra-curricular activities.

Parenting is often a lonely task, and certainly parenting a gifted child is even more so. Finding others who face these challenges and who deal with similar issues is like the proverbial breath of fresh air. Not only can parents be reassured that they are not alone in the demanding responsibilities they face, but they also can use each other as valuable resources. Discussing challenges met and sharing solutions to problems give parents much needed support and relief. As they feel more comfortable and relaxed in their Herculean tasks, their children will sense their assurance and feel less anxious about themselves and their differentness.

Parents may connect with others through membership in local associations related to gifted children or, as their children form linkages, with parents of their children's friends.

Educators of the gifted face isolation similar to that of the parents of their students. As programs are cut and teachers are stretched ever thinner, they become a rarer and rarer breed. A single teacher may serve as a resource teacher at five or more school sites. Their frustrations at what they are able to offer their students and the stress of constantly moving from site to site may seem overwhelming at times. For personal and professional reasons, educators need to network with each other to share ideas and offer moral support and empathy.

The best way for educators to network is through a professional organization. If active participation in such a body is not feasible, attendance at state or national conferences is critical. Conventions and conferences offer a mother lode of ideas, materials, sharing, and support.

Networking is a necessity; it consists of relationships or connections we make with those who are not related by family or formal ties. It gives each of us the support and nurturance we need to be who we are and become what we can become. This necessary ingredient may not be part of the life of gifted children unless adults take steps to ensure its inclusion.

**Shirley W. Schiever, Ph.D.,** is a curriculum specialist at the Fine Arts Magnet School in Tucson, Arizona, and the author of ***A Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Thinking***.

*Stephanie S. Tolan*

# THE READING ROOM

In 1950 e. e. cummings wrote a poem in which he said that not until nature behaved the way human beings do, would he believe in that "unanimal," mankind. Though we cannot quote from the poem without paying the publisher a substantial fee, you can find it in *100 Selected Poems*, Grove Press, 1959. (In that volume it is #89; in other anthologies you can find it by its first line, "when serpents bargain for the right to squirm.") Imagining nature with human characteristics, cummings saw oaks having to ask birch trees to let them make acorns, valleys taking offense at the altitude of mountains, March resenting April. We were reminded of this poem as we read last fall's federal report, *National Excellence*, on the state of gifted education in America. [See *UOG, 6*(2), 2, 15, 16, 19.] Forty-five years after cummings wrote that poem, mankind hasn't changed much.

It should be no surprise to any of us that anti-intellectualism continues to flourish in a country which began with the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's words—*"all men are created equal"*—remain our most enduring cultural slogan. Unfortunately for gifted children, that slogan has been distorted to mean to many people that no one should (or does) come into the world with any greater potential than anyone else. (Most of us accept that some people are born to be more beautiful or taller, or even more athletic. But brighter? Never.)

In America today perhaps more than ever before in our rabidly egalitarian history, valleys resent the altitude of mountains. Recognizing the gifted student's innate reality, we fear, may make another student feel inadequate. So the politically correct thing to do is treat everyone "equally." Never mind that Zachary already reads; give him phonics worksheets with the rest of his class. Never mind that Katie understands fractions and percents, keep her adding and subtracting two digit numbers with "her group." Unless all trees can make acorns, none of them shall!

Many of our most intelligent children sit day after day, year after year, in heterogeneous classrooms learning little or nothing. And few who champion this kind of education consider what must happen either to individual children or to a country that distrusts differences, disallows gifts, and insists there must be no "best and brightest."

In 1960 Kurt Vonnegut took on our cultural blind spot, writing "Harrison Bergeron," a short story included in his book, *Welcome to the Monkey House*.

*"The year was 2081,"* it begins, *"and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law, they were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else; nobody was better looking than anybody else; nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else."* All this, we learn, has been accomplished by law under the aegis of the United States Handicapper General and her agents. Beautiful people are required to wear ugly masks, strong people to carry heavy weights, and intelligent people to wear "handicap radios" in their ears. These radios, connected to a government transmitter, emit mind-shattering sounds at random intervals to keep bright people from following a line of thought and thus "taking unfair advantage of their brains."

Now workers get and keep their jobs by being not very good at them (not any better than anyone else). Nothing, therefore, is done well. People might get upset at that if they could think long enough to get upset about anything.

Harrison Bergeron is a threat to this brave new world because at 14 he is impossibly bright, handsome, tall, athletic and strong. Taken from his parents' home by the H-G Men, he escapes, breaks into a television station, rips off his handicaps and proclaims himself Emperor. Taking a ballerina for his Empress, Harrison dances to the beat of his true reality.

In such a world his fate is inevitable. Vonnegut's biting satire should keep kids discussing the pros and cons of equality until the next federal report.

**Stephanie Tolan**, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child.***

# Personality Plus

## Asynchrony in Adults

In our lead article, "The Courage to Network," Maddi Wallach shows how asynchrony continues to be relevant in adult life. Many parents of gifted children feel out-of-sync with others. However, Maddi's insightful observation that many gifted children arrive at adulthood "*with extraordinary abilities and unusual deficits*" (p. 11) adds an entirely new dimension to the concept of giftedness as asynchronous development. The need for such an article was brought home strikingly by a recent letter from Kathy Courchene from Snellville, Georgia:

*...Why are these problems of asynchrony usually examined as children's problems?*

*It is true that this difficulty begins in childhood, but does it really ever end? I remember vividly troublesome and troubling episodes from my own childhood that were due to asynchronous development—though of course I didn't know anything about the concept at the time—and I also see my own children struggling with this difficulty. I'd like to be able to tell them that it will not be a problem when they are older, but I can't honestly say that!*

*...I have to admit that I, like many other gifted adults in my milieu, am working through many unresolved issues from my own past as I am learning and working to improve education and social acceptance for my own children. It was thrilling to read a confirmation of my own long-held view that 'giftedness' is about the inner life, and not what one does, or produces!*

*...The important thing to remember is that giftedness is a way of being. It is internal, and intrinsic to the personality. It may or may not be expressed in great achievements.* ***Highly gifted people can and do live very 'normal'-looking lives, while at the same time are living a parallel, inner life that is not 'normal' at all.*** *[emphasis added]*

*Sometimes the inner life can complicate the outer one, but just knowing more about the inner life, and its reasons for being, are immensely helpful in making both lives mesh.*

*I was an art major in college... However, I have done very little, professionally, as an artist, and am not now earning my living as an artist. I don't know, at this point, if I will ever choose to do so. So, am I an artist, or not? Our society generally defines an artist as someone who is actively engaged as an artist, showing her/his art to the public, perhaps earning money from the works, or just regularly producing works of art for whatever purpose. I am doing none of these things at this time. So again I ask: am I allowed to call myself an artist?*

*I believe that the answer is yes. I am an artist not because of what I may or may not produce, but because of the way in which I see. As I look at the world around me, I am always aware of patterns, of contrasts, of line and mass. I make art in my mind, as I perceive certain things visually, and translate them. Obviously I have no driving need at this point in my life to put these things down on paper for others to look at, or else I would probably be doing just that. Right now, I am content with my internal life as an artist, and am at peace with my view that what an artist is lies inside, not in what is produced outside.*

*In the same way, then, I have come to apply this to my view of giftedness. I am not saying that I never feel lonely or out of step, but I am more content to live with this asynchrony because I do not feel that I have to achieve in a way that would meet society's image of giftedness, nor do I feel obligated to buy into the tendency to minimize the differences. I finally accept asynchrony as a way of life, plan to learn more about it, and hope to be able to continue to have a dialogue with others who share the same concerns.*

Yes, Kathy, you *are* an artist! I was deeply touched by your wisdom and wanted to share as much of it as possible with our readers. It is exciting to discover new facets and implications of the theory of asynchrony filtered through the personal experiences of Maddi Wallach and Kathy Courchene.

**Linda Silverman, Ph.D.,** is a licensed psychologist, Director of the Gifted Development Center in Denver, Colorado, and Editor of ***Counseling the Gifted and Talented.***

### *ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT: A Journal on Adult Giftedness*

Gifted children usually have gifted parents. If you are wondering about your own giftedness, subscribe to ***Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness.*** No other journal focuses specifically on gifted adults. Unlike the traditional view of adult giftedness as high levels of productivity and creativity, advanced development in adults is defined as the deepening of the personality and strengthening of human values such as empathy, concern for others, responsibility and integrity.

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explore the potential for creating a state-wide professional academy for educators of gifted, talented, and creative students. The purpose of the proposed Academy would be to provide validation for the training and experiences of the state's professional educators of gifted and talented students. Such an organization would not just be another certification agency. Any agency can check a person's paperwork. Nomination to the Academy would assure that a respected professional shepherded a candidate's membership in the Academy and would stand by the nominee's quality of professional work. There was unanimous agreement that the proposed Academy was needed and that it would provide a valuable service in the state.

In this article I will describe how classroom teachers, school administrators, researchers, publishers, private consultants, and university faculty members who serve gifted, talented, and creative persons in one state worked cooperatively to create a professional academy.

Networking was a critical factor in the formation of the Academy. At each stage of development, all founding members received information about proposed ideas and were asked to provide feedback during the critical evolutionary stages of the organization's formation. Networking continues to be the lifeblood of the fledgling organization that is now two years old.

Nothing in the nominating procedures or organizational structure is fixed. As we continue to grow, we are creating a viable, living organization fitted to the needs of its members. Some examples: The Board of Governors was increased from five members to eight this past year to facilitate a greater sharing of the work load of the officers and to bring the views of our newest members to the forefront. Current governors are charged with the responsibility of writing their own job descriptions to reflect the real duties and responsibilities they are experiencing. At a recent meeting of Academy members, the goal statement of the organization was revised to reflect the direction the growing, evolving organization is taking. Healthy discussions of the membership nominating procedures have led to the decision to allow twice as many new members to join the Academy in the coming year.

In formative discussions a new conceptual approach to the Academy was considered and adopted. The original notion of a professional organization with the sole purpose of providing a peer form of endorsement was dropped in favor of a broader conception of an academy of professional educators whose interests included service and professional growth as well as competence validation.

As the founding members networked with still other educators in the state, it became apparent that this newer and enlarged conception of the proposed Academy's purpose was appealing because it appeared to have great potential for accomplishing many aims among educators of gifted students in Colorado, not the least of which might be the **mentoring** of newer members in the field by more experienced members of the profession. The potential for creating important links and networks among members was also appealing.

Once the broader concept of the Academy was embraced by the founding members, much of the rest of the work of creating the organization fell into place quickly and easily. Early discussions revealed the need to formally state the goals of the proposed Academy. A goal statement was drafted and worked on over a period of several months by the founders. The resultant goal statement of the Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative appears in Figure 1.

The Academy is modeled on such professional and honorary organizations as Phi Delta Kappa and the American Bar Association. Membership in the Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative is active and participatory, for a lifetime, and—at the present time—by invitation. Academy membership is for professional educators who have demonstrated levels of high performance and competence, and requires a professional investment greater than the mere payment of dues. Professional persons who serve gifted, talented, and creative students and who have met criteria similar to those used by many states for endorsement or certification are invited into membership in the Academy. An induction ceremony is held annually to induct new members. New members receive framed certificates of membership.

Considerable care has been taken to be sure that the Academy does not compete with existing gifted education organizations in the state. Academy members, for example, continue to have important and very positive links with the Colorado Association for the Gifted and Talented (CAG/T), the state's largest parent-teacher advocacy organization for gifted students.

The membership criteria for the Academy was established through discussions and communications among founding members over a period of several months. The purpose of the membership nomination process is to locate and encourage membership in the Academy of all interested persons who professionally serve the gifted, talented, and creative population in Colorado. Academy membership criteria and suggested forms of portfolio documentation for each criterion are outlined in Figure 2.

In August, 1992, the ten founding members were inducted into the Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative. The founding members included classroom teachers, university professors, researchers, psychologists, a private foundation leader, a publisher and private consultant, a district-wide administrator of programs for gifted students, and the state department of education consultant for gifted education. The founding members all have been actively involved in gifted child education for a minimum of ten years. All of the founding members filed membership portfolios fully documenting the many ways in which they themselves meet all membership criteria for the Academy.

## How the Academy Membership Grows

In the first year of operation, each founding member nominated three professional educators for Academy membership. The membership rules of the Academy specifically state the responsibility of the nominating members to make sure that all persons they nominate for membership meet all criteria for Academy membership and that the nominee's work is considered exemplary by at least one member. Such personal contact was designed to avoid the rejection of any nominated candidate.

Nominations for membership are submitted to the membership governor, who then forwards application packets to all nominees. The nominees prepare and submit portfolios documenting the ways they meet the five criteria for Academy membership. The Academy's board of governors reviews all portfolios to determine that the membership qualifications, indeed, have been met. The presiding governor then formally sends letters of invitation to new members. New members are inducted at an annual meeting which may coincide with another state-wide educational event or through a separate meeting of the Academy membership.

Figure 1

### Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted,Talented, and Creative

#### Academy Belief Statement

*We believe in the fundamental right of all children to receive an education commensurate with their talents and abilities. We believe that gifted, talented, and creative children and adolescents have special needs that require at least partial special educational services. We believe that it is critical that such services be facilitated and/or delivered by educators who have credentials that attest to their possession of a fundamental knowledge base and expert training in the nature and nurture of giftedness, and substantial working experiences with gifted, talented and creative youths. We believe that such fundamental knowledge, training, and experience cannot be left to whim or chance. We believe that current professional educators within the field of gifted child education in the state of Colorado who have a wealth of experience and knowledge are best suited to recognize expertise in others. We believe in professional excellence and peer review.*

#### Academy Goal Statement

*The Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented and Creative exists for the express purpose of recognizing, stimulating, nurturing, and strengthening professional excellence in the delivery of educational services to the vast population of gifted, talented, and creative children and youth in Colorado.*

The membership procedures are designed to facilitate the smooth growth of the organization. In the second year of the Academy's existence, each founding member nominated two additional professional educators for membership in the Academy class of 1994. The addition of 20 new members brought the Academy's membership roll to nearly 60 persons. In 1995 and thereafter, members who have been in the Academy for two years may nominate two persons for membership annually. Hence, the potential for the Academy to grow exponentially exists. Exclusivity is not the aim of the Academy.

At the 1993 induction ceremony of the first class of members, the first numbered certificate of the Academy was posthumously awarded to Rita Dickinson, a remarkable Colorado pioneer in the psychology and education of gifted students. Dr. Dickinson studied 20,000 gifted children for 40 years at her own expense. Most of these children were from disadvantaged backgrounds. Her research efforts established that gifted children are equally distributed in all socioeconomic levels, and that poorer children are least often recognized.

Numbered certificates, 02 through 100, have been reserved for honoring individuals who have made very special contributions to gifted, talented, and creative students in the state. Thus far, Irving Sato, a prior state consultant, John F. Feldhusen, and Joyce Van Tassel-Baska have been so honored.

Figure 2

**Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative**

**Membership Criteria and Portfolio Documentation**

1. Current or former professional educator in the education and development of gifted, creative, and talented students.
   *Examples: Professional teachers (K-12 or college), researchers, and psychologists.*

   Proof of current or former employment, including specification of the type of work. Evidence may include letters on agency letterhead stationery, or comparable evidence.

2. Minimum of nine semester hours of graduate course work in the education of gifted students or comparable preparation.
   *Examples:*
   *Curriculum for the Gifted*
   *Nature and Needs of the Gifted*
   *Nature of Intelligence*
   *Psycho-Social Needs*
   *Assessment of Gifted Students*
   *Content area classes for the gifted (e.g., mathematics)*
   *Transcripts or comparable evidence of academic expertise (e.g., syllabi from courses taught).*

3. Minimum of one graduate course in statistics, research, measurement, and/or evaluation. Transcripts or comparable evidence.

4. Minimum of three years substantial practical experience with gifted youth.
   *Examples: Classroom teaching, extra-school teaching (e.g., summer programs), direct research work, counseling.*

   Description of practical experience, letters from supervisors, personnel directors, transcripts with practicum credit noted, or comparable evidence.

5. Substantial demonstrated service or contribution to gifted and talented education.
   *Examples:*
   *Professional journal writing*
   *Presentations at conferences*
   *Officer in organizations and associations*
   *Editorship of professional newsletter, journal for gifted*
   *Pro bono work in the education of gifted youth*
   *Documentation and/or self-report of offices held, published works, presentations made, pro bono work, Colorado Department of Education committee work, or comparable evidence.*

## Academy Governance

The Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative has a board of governors consisting of eight members: presiding governor, membership governor, fiscal governor, professional development governor, service governor, and three at-large governors. In concert with the total membership, the board of governors is drafting bylaws for the Academy, and the fiscal governor has submitted the Academy's application for Articles of Incorporation as a nonprofit organization. Governors network with the membership to determine how best to fulfill the Academy's service to its membership. For example, the professional development governor polled the current Academy membership to determine professional development priorities. This networking resulted in the expression of the following concerns.

The Academy should:

1. *Continue to recognize individuals for their exceptional contributions to the education of gifted, talented, and creative in the state.*
2. *Provide opportunities for communication among professional peers.*
3. *Influence political decisions regarding law, funding, and standards for our gifted, talented, and creative children and youth.*
4. *Publish newsletters and pamphlets related to our field.*
5. *Provide a clearinghouse of human, print, and electronic resources related to special education for gifted, talented, and creative students.*

Governors serve two-year terms of office, and no Academy member may serve on the board of governors more than two consecutive years. All members must rotate off the board of governors for a minimum of one

*A NETWORK OF SCHOLARS Continued from page 10*

calendar year before serving a subsequent term on the board. Provisions have been made to stagger the terms of the first board so that a complete turnover of leadership does not occur in any single year.

An initial membership fee of $45 is charged to all new Academy members. This fee pays for mailing costs, framed certificate of membership, and other benefits of Academy membership. Continuing, active membership requires a small payment of annual dues to cover the costs of mailings and continued documentation of active service to gifted education.

Members receive opportunities to network with each other. They are provided with membership lists that create opportunities to receive mailings and press releases about coming events. Members to date have received copies of newsletters, author signings, and other opportunities for professional networking. Academy members also receive priority notification of upcoming conferences and publications.

## Conclusion

The founders of the Colorado Academy of Educators for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative worked cooperatively to create an organization that seeks to validate professional people for the course work, conference attendance, service, and personal time and commitment they have invested in the field of gifted child education. The Academy is similar to associations found in other professions that aim to establish standards of excellence within their province. The founding members believe they have created one alternative for professional endorsement that may serve as a model to educators in others states (or regional service districts, counties, cities, etc.) who desire endorsement or certification for educators of the gifted and talented. Several founding members of the Academy shared the formative work of developing the Academy with educators from several other states at the 1992 convention of the National Association for Gifted Children in Los Angeles.

It is hoped that in years to come the Academy will have a substantial and positive impact on the growth of professional development and service to the educators of gifted children in Colorado and beyond.

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*THE COURAGE TO NETWORK Continued from page 1*

asynchronous development in childhood [e.g., Morelock, 1992, *UOG, 4*(3)]. But what are these children like when they grow up? Do they "fit better" into society's institutions than they did into school systems? Can giftedness go away? Does asynchrony even out? A very small but growing network of people has begun to try to understand the ramifications of asynchronous development throughout the life cycle, so that the answers to these questions can be discovered.

There are a multitude of lists of the traits of gifted children, but very few published inventories of the characteristics of gifted adults. The most comprehensive discussion of this topic found in the literature was Annemarie Roeper's (1991) "Gifted adults: Their characteristics and emotions." The following list of characteristics of gifted adults was compiled from a variety of sources, such as the Columbus Group, *Advanced Development Journal*, The Gifted Development Center, Annemarie Roeper's insights, and my own observations:

- ***Asynchronous development causing arrival at adulthood with extraordinary abilities and unusual deficits***
- ***The ability to connect, synthesize or distill normally unrelated domains***
- ***Multipotentiality***
- ***Perfectionism***
- ***Questioning***
- ***Extremely rapid learning***
- ***Love of ideas and ardent discussions***
- ***Feeling misunderstood***
- ***Feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of one's own intellectual, creative or emotional intensity***
- ***Increased level of inner conflict***
- ***Heightened sensitivity***
- ***Outrage at moral breaches that the rest of the world seems to take for granted***
- ***A need to search for meaning in both the inner and outer worlds***
- ***Developing one's own method of learning and grasping concepts***
- ***Retaining childlike emotions***
- ***Perceptively intuitive***
- ***A sense of alienation and loneliness***
- ***A feeling of coming apart***
- ***A feeling of being out of step, on a separate path***
- ***Unique perception and awareness***
- ***Preference for complexity and comfort with ambiguity***

If you see yourself in roughly two-thirds of this list, you are probably an unidentified or reconfirmed gifted adult. It is unlikely that anyone would fit all of the descriptors, due to human variation as well as suppression of some of these traits. If you have spent much of your life trying to conform or perform, some of these descriptors

might describe who you were as a child or who you really are, lurking under the surface, rather than who you think you are. Also, there are many kinds of gifted people. Some are linear sequential thinkers who explore ideas starting at point A, and move in sequence to arrive at point Z. In contrast, there are random, conceptual, abstract thinkers who might arrive at Z first, and work backwards in a random order or not want to fill in the details at all.

As you review this list, some of you may be considering the possibility of your own giftedness for the first time. Your reaction may be shock or a mixture of relief *(Finally, a description of me in print!)* and fear *(What are the implications of identifying myself as a gifted adult?)*. Most of you read *Understanding Our Gifted* to help you understand your children. Bumping into your own giftedness may be a twist you had not bargained for.

As gifted children grown up, and as parents of gifted children, we are often faced with the challenge of inventing new pathways and convincing ourselves, the schools, and the world that these pathways are necessary. This work can be overwhelming and redundant in isolation. Networking offers strategies and support for both children and adults. Being different in this society can be frightening. Talking to people who understand and can help makes facing the unknown and unusual needs of ourselves and our children much safer and easier.

## The Emotional Impact of a Gifted Lifespan

The issues of special need around giftedness are multi-layered. Most parents of highly gifted children are, to one extent or another, casualties of a childhood where their needs as gifted children were misunderstood, pathologized or unmet. [See Tolan, 1992, *UOG, 4*(3).] Many still feel the pain of the myriad misinterpretations of their differentness. Mislabels such as "too sensitive," "overdisciplined" or "undisciplined," "argumentative," "out of step," "tangential," "hyperactive," "too intense," "perfectionistic" or "careless," "Martianistic," "showoffy," tore away their self-confidence until they went underground. It is intensely bittersweet to find out that these traits that brought so much shame are normal for the gifted.

According to most educators, and most people in general, high intelligence is related to advanced, sequential, *synchronous* development which allows people to excel and makes life easier. In school settings, if you enrich and slightly advance such children, they will do well. However, this does not describe people with high levels of giftedness, who are often extremely asynchronous in their development with an endless variety of patterns of strengths and weaknesses. This small percentage of the gifted population is so far away from the norm that they are profoundly, developmentally and affectively different—sometimes unrecognizable as gifted to their parents, themselves and especially schools and institutions at large. Even when they are recognized in the schools, the curriculum designed for normal and slightly advanced children their age does not meet their needs. If they lack interest in relearning material they already know or in practicing skills they have already mastered, they will often be blamed for their lack of motivation. As adults, they may not be able to "rise to the top," because they think too differently from the decision-makers in their fields. High levels of giftedness make life more complicated rather than easier.

*Most parents of highly gifted children are, to one extent or another, casualties of a childhood where their needs as gifted children were misunderstood, pathologized or unmet.*

Asynchronous development is difficult to recognize in childhood as well as in adulthood. An example is a nine-year-old child with an IQ of 191, who spells on a second grade level, adds and subtracts slowly, and writes slowly, but can do algebra, creates beautiful poetry, perceives psychologically and sociologically on an adult level, feels like she is being tortured if the work is repetitive, has adult empathy for the disenfranchised people of the world and the endangered earth and animals, loves to read, is a gifted gymnast, wears lipstick, has wit as sophisticated and as quick as an adult, and sleeps with a stuffed animal. If this girl were in a public school fourth grade, they might not even know she was gifted because within the context of the fourth grade curriculum, her areas of giftedness would not come into play very often. If they did notice, they would call her careless, lazy and would look for some psychological reason to explain her poor performance. She would be blamed and probably believe their judgments. So might her parents, unless they were aware of their own giftedness, had come to terms with their own pain, and were willing to advocate for their daughter.

Consider another configuration of asynchrony: a 38-year-old man with an IQ of 160. As a young child, he was very curious, extremely physically active, stubborn, mischievous, too socially gregarious in school, very intensely alive. His parents did not understand his exceptional giftedness or creativity or know how to manage his high energy.

They valued achievement by society's standards, and often abused him into towing the mark. He graduated valedictorian of his high school, one of the top 20 basketball players in the country, serious, focused and achievement oriented—appearing by all external standards to be "fulfilling his potential"; however, internally, he was totally incongruent, living somebody else's empty dream, suicidal. He continued to perform for authority, always looking for the next award, until he was 33, and then he hit the wall. After much confusion and pain, he found his own path. He developed a life or death need to write and to follow his other passions as well. In this situation, there was severe asynchrony between his own internal needs and the expectations of his environment. When he tried to live up to his parents' expectations, he was out-of-sync with himself. In the gifted, the need to use their gifts is as intense as the gifts themselves. Failure to understand and actualize one's potential can cause pain severe enough to make a person want to die.

## Talking about Giftedness is Taboo

Our society is poorly designed for the needs of the highly gifted. This group is invisible to the general population. Gifted adults, with or without children, dare not identify themselves. It is absolutely taboo to say your child—never mind you—is gifted. This is considered bragging; besides, everybody has gifts of equal value. Yes, the second part is true, and very important, but gifted people usually do not discuss their giftedness or the giftedness of their children for the purpose of bragging. Gifted people need to talk to each other because their development, experiences and needs are radically different from the norm. Parents of highly gifted children are usually left to improvise solutions to their problems in isolation. That is why networking with others of similar ability and concerns is essential.

Networking is also needed to gain basic information that is lacking in the literature. There are no books to guide parents of highly gifted children about the unique developmental patterns of their children. A mother of an exceptionally gifted child bought a book on early childhood development that included a range of developmental expectations. Her daughter was doing at four months what an active child was supposed to do at eight months, as well as many things that were not in the book at all. She purchased a book about gifted children, and still found no sign of her daughter. Numerous other books were also of little value. Everything her daughter did was considered "impossible" by most of the child development experts. At four months old, children do not understand what you are saying. You cannot reason with a six-month-old child. A 2 1/2 year old could not have curiosity about death.

*"How old is your daughter?"* asked the mother's friend's nine-year-old daughter. *"She's three,"* replied the mother. *"Then why does she talk like a nine year old?"* continued the girl. The mother became fearful. She knew it was boastful to say, *"My daughter is extremely intelligent,"* so she replied, *"Oh, she's just always liked words."*

This mother was placed in a tremendous double bind. On the one hand, she was afraid to talk about her daughter, and, on the other, she was desperate to talk about her, because the books were saying the child's existence was impossible. She became very anxious and lonely. She sensed the enormous potential in her child, hence her enormous responsibility as a parent. The accepted experts had nothing to offer her, and it was taboo to discuss the situation.

What the child development experts have to offer is actually **counter-productive**. They insinuate that early precocity is the exclusive product of bad parenting: parents mistakenly create high levels of giftedness by pushing intellectual growth at the expense of providing good, balanced development.

> *To elevate a child's intellectual growth to a position where it becomes of primary concern is, in my opinion, harmful to the child. In extensive observations of three to six year old children, we have found many children who are intellectually quite precocious, able to converse fluently, able to do simple arithmetic, equipped with all sorts of information far in excess of what most children their age have and yet are quite unhappy and uncomfortable in dealing with children and adults other than those in their nuclear family. My message is, beware of equating brightness with good development. Intellectual superiority is frequently obtained at the expense of progress in areas of equal or even greater importance.* (White, 1975, p. 35)

***In the gifted, the need to use their gifts is as intense as the gifts themselves.***

This is simply untrue. Many exceptionally gifted children begin to read, converse fluently, and do arithmetic before the age of three without being taught at all. Many will beg to be taught these things and volumes more. Some will have trouble with their peers, not because they have been pushed and raised in an unbalanced way, but because they are emotionally four and mentally nine, and there will be ways in which they need nine year olds as much as four year olds.

Many parents never find resources to help them deal with their exceptionally gifted children. Those who do have usually gone through a number of years of internal and external condemnation, loneliness and confusion first. This still leaves the problem of facing a critically misunderstanding and disbelieving world.

## Networking Can Help

Raising an exceptionally gifted child often leads to deep levels of self-revelation. A mother described flashbacks to her own childhood that were painful, jarring and shocking. Was it possible that her own mother wasn't exaggerating when she claimed that she began speaking at six months? What about the songs and poetry she created at three, the books she memorized? Is that why she asked so many tangential questions in school? Why she couldn't sleep? Why she always felt like a Martian? But if she had been so smart herself, why didn't she do well in school?

At first, she dismissed the whole question and pushed the memories away. Then, the awareness slowly came that she would only be able to help her own daughter if she faced the shattering pain of reframing her past. She began to educate herself about giftedness—her own as well as her child's—so that she could learn how to use her potential and advocate for her daughter.

It is easy to see how much courage and education it would take to claim our children's and our own giftedness in the face of so much conditioning, pain, stigma and silence—especially since many gifted people tend to be extremely sensitive. But consider the possible gains.

To borrow from Martin Luther King, Jr., "I have a dream": I have a dream that together, in small groups across the country, we could move from emotional resistance to political education. By networking, we could support each other through the pain, anger and losses of our childhood. We could educate ourselves about giftedness in our children and in ourselves—create a safe environment to talk about being gifted. We could strategize about our children's educational needs and plans. We could help our children find each other.

Networking is about sharing the sources of precious information and expanding upon them. Psychological development of people with high levels of giftedness is not well understood. It is in many ways significantly different from normal development. For instance, you might be likely to have a child with "the terrible ones," instead of "the terrible twos"; abstract thought at two instead of at ages eight to ten; empathy and a sense of social justice at ages two to three, instead of at eight to ten. These developmental differences have many consequences that networks of parents and other gifted adults could help each other understand.

Last, it is my dream that some of the people in these networks might want to begin the work of each acting on a local level to educate the schools and the public about the existence of, the development of, and the needs of this misunderstood population. At high levels of giftedness, these people are as differently-abled as the low end of the IQ spectrum. Therefore, they need to be identified and talked about, not because they are superior, but because they have *special needs*. The lack of understanding about psychological differences of the highly gifted and asynchronous development leaves them to suffer severe traumas. This is a neglected, often unidentified at-risk population who could be so much happier, and contribute so much more to the world, if they were understood, nurtured and allowed to be educated more appropriately. At present, many gifted people hide in little pockets so they won't get hurt or live somebody else's dream. By networking, we can support each other's authenticity and dreams and possibly find the courage to change the societal misconceptions that harm us and our children.

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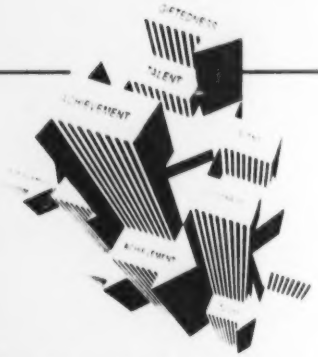
### *Why?*

*The world turned into a zoo,*
*Without a tiger or a kangaroo.*
*A zoo of people with ills.*
*A zoo of people who run bulldozers over hills.*
*A zoo of people who think of themselves.*
*A zoo of people who don't believe in elves.*
*A zoo of people, to my dismay,*
*Are a zoo of people who don't know how to play.*
*A zoo of people who think life is black and white.*
*A zoo of people who don't work things out, they fight.*
*How did we let this happen?*
*How come we are all just nappin'?*
*While the trees go away,*
*And the sky gets gray.*
*Why, Why, Why, Why, Why?!*

**Bailey Whiteside (Age 9)**



# A Response to John Feldhusen's Rejoinder

Richard W. Ronvik, M.S.

Since I have agreed with almost everything John Feldhusen has ever said or written on gifted education, or talent development if he prefers, I read with interest, and some confusion, his "Foundations of Talent: A Rejoinder to R. W. Ronvik," [*Understanding Our Gifted, 6*(2)] which is a response to my original article "Re-examining the Foundations of Giftedness," [*Understanding Our Gifted, 5*(6)].

Let me see if I have this straight. Feldhusen and his students criticize my use of the term "gifted," prefer the term "talent," "talented," or "talented youth," and cite as evidence the fact that in school practice, tests to identify "gifted youth" are sometimes misused and that "gifted education" programs run the gamut from weak to strong, implying presumably that with the term "talented" this could not possibly happen.

They criticize my possible use of intelligence tests or achievement tests, as part of the credible measures I call for in identifying gifted children by saying that these are "quite fallible" and then go on to say that we should match youth "with curriculum and instruction that affords an appropriate challenge, given their level of prior *achievement*" (emphasis mine).

They take me to task for suggesting that enrichment is related to depth and intensity, and go on to eliminate the term "enrichment" by reducing it to "acceleration" and later state that "ultimately there is no acceleration." The terms are vaporizing even as we speak.

Feldhusen and his team find it "incredible" that I have concerns about the definition of "talent." They seem to imply that since Feldhusen, Bloom, and Csikszentmihalyi seem to understand what it means, how could Ronvik even question the term.

Cutts and Moseley (1957), in their book *Teaching the Bright and Gifted*, define "talented" as, "All pupils who show unusual ability along non-academic lines..."(p. 3). Hildreth (1966), in her *Introduction to the Gifted*, refers to "talented" as, "A term most commonly applied to exceptional performance in such non-academic areas as sports, dramatics, dancing, music, arts and crafts, mechanical skills, and social leadership" (p. 33). Owen, Blount, and Moscow (1978), in *Educational Psychology: An Introduction*, state that they believe "talented" refers to "persons of superior skills who do not necessarily show high intelligence" (p. 560). Newland (1976), in *The Gifted in Socio-educational Perspective*, claims that "talented" refers to "those who have demonstrated superior skill and whose promise is not primarily based on a function of their superior conceptualization capacity" (p. 24).

The four different definitions for "talented" that I cited in the original article are all taken from the literature and common usage in the field of gifted education, and each definition would yield a different population of children. My concern is not "incredible" in the least.

In the same way that Feldhusen and his team criticize the term "gifted" because there is an implication that those not selected are "ungifted," we can also say that those not grouped in a talent development program are presumably "untalented." Feldhusen is correct when he says that I see the issue as "simply a matter of terminology."

I think most parents would find it completely irrelevant whether students receiving special services were called *gifted*, or *talented*, or *precocious*, or *academically able* or whether they were called anything at all. What they are extremely frustrated about is the neglect of gifted or talented children through either a total lack of program services, or the notion that a brief resource room pull-out program or a Saturday program will somehow satisfy the needs of gifted and talented students with little or no adjustment to the basic five day per week school program.

What is needed was stated very nicely in the book, *Toward Excellence in Gifted Education*, when John Feldhusen (1985) said, "*The ideal program for the gifted at the elementary level is the full-time or self-contained model, at least for all the basic academic subjects*" (p. 182).

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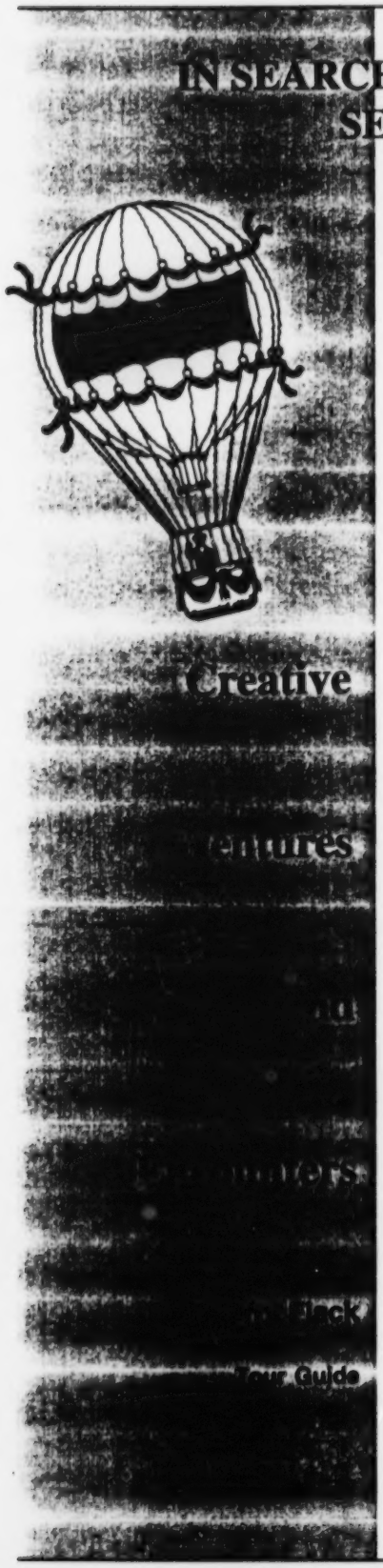


# IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

## Fairy Tales, Part II

*Let us continue our voyage to the land of enchantment (begun in our last journey) where young people can use the timeless literature of fairy tales as a wellspring for their own creative expression and to explore their own family heritage.*

In many fairy tales a beautiful maiden meets a handsome prince and they overcome great obstacles to live happily ever after. Students can interview their grandparents, inquiring how they met, courted, and were married. Students can then weave the details of their romance into an original fairy tale that they illustrate and give to their grandparents as an anniversary gift.

Students can write letters to Santa Claus informing Santa what presents they believe would be most appropriate for such fairy tale characters as the Big, Bad Wolf, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, and Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

Students also love to write fractured fairy tales. Ask students to select a favorite fairy tale and read it carefully, noting the plot, character descriptions, and action sequences. Next, they should brainstorm a complete list of contemporary slang words and expressions used to describe people, places, actions, and feelings. This list serves as a dictionary or thesaurus as each student then rewrites the chosen traditional fairy tale in slang. The resulting products are funny and should definitely be shared orally with peers in small groups.

Students may choose to write limericks or epitaphs for and about fairy tale characters. Here are two examples:

*There once was a lady of great fright!*
*Stepmother of lovely Snow White.*
*She looked at the mirror,*
*Which said, "Sorry, my dear."*
*And she sent the girl off into the night.*

*Here rest the stepsisters of Cinderella;*
*They're sad 'cause she got the fella!*

Creative thinking exercises are natural extensions of young people's encounters with fairy tale literature. Ask students to imagine that they own a mirror of amazing powers similar to the one Snow White's stepmother possessed. What are ten very important questions they would like the mirror to answer? Suppose the third sibling of the Three Little Pigs did not have a house with a fireplace and chimney. Suppose that instead his house is heated with solar power. How might the Three Little Pigs rid themselves of the pestiferous wolf? Ask students to describe and illustrate their solutions. Imagine that all the fairy godmothers have gone on strike. How will Cinderella go to the ball? Invite students to design a new means of transportation. The woodsman is also off somewhere else and is not around to save Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. How might Little Red Riding Hood rescue her grandmother and dispose of the Big, Bad Wolf?

*On our next voyage we will return to the land of imagination and examine how creative students might become outstanding planners and entrepreneurs and create a new fairy tale shopping mall for children.*

**Jerry Flack, Ph.D.,** is a President's Teaching Scholar and Professor of Gifted Education at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs, and the author of several books, including ***Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors*** and ***Lives of Promise.***

*Kathi Kearney*

# HE HIGHLY GIFTED

## Networking: Essential Tools, Essential Skills

Where do you locate an expert in Cree Indian animal myths? How does a rural school in an isolated island community provide enough math courses for the nine year old who has already completed Algebra I? To whom can a family turn when they have just found out that their seven year old scored above 190 IQ on the Stanford-Binet L-M?

Networking is a critical component in parenting and educating highly gifted children. Often, it is the *only* way the resources necessary for optimal development can be procured. It is almost always necessary to reach beyond the standard resources available in most schools and communities in order to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of these children.

Even resources generally appropriate for gifted children may not be enough; Tolan (1985) notes, "I began going to conferences on giftedness where I noticed an interesting phenomenon. Parents of *exceptionally* gifted children found the least help at conferences" (p. 23). Schools, too, often find their resources (and their policies) taxed to the limit. Both families and schools must approach networking in a systematic manner in order to marshal the resources highly gifted children will need as they grow up. Parents and educators should plan at the outset to record information in a ring binder or on a computer database for future reference. Networking has a "snowball" effect; one contact is likely to yield the names, addresses, and phone numbers of several other potential resources. It is important to keep track of this information in such a way that it can be retrieved easily.

### *Networking Essentials for Parents*

- *Establish connections with other families of highly gifted children.* Although the school may not be able to give you this information because of privacy laws, advocacy groups for the gifted usually know of other parents of highly gifted children who are willing to be contacted. It is absolutely essential for these families to talk with each other.

- *Keep an ongoing list of resources.* Such a record should include the notebook or database described above; records of conversations with staff at your child's school; plus pertinent research, journal articles, books, and useful press clippings.

- *Get to know your local legislators and your U.S. Senators and Representatives.* If you are so inclined, help with their campaigns, and establish contacts in their offices. Their assistance is not limited to favorable votes on gifted education legislation. Politicians can also help you access information and make your way through difficult bureaucratic hurdles. One U.S. Senator's office intervened when a ten year old who otherwise qualified academically was denied federal financial aid for college simply because she lacked a high school diploma and was not old enough to take the GED exam. He introduced a bill in the legislature waiving the compulsory attendance law for full-time college students under the age of 17.

- *Read everything you can find about highly gifted children, and share these readings with your child's school if you think it will help.*

### *Networking Essentials for Schools*

- *Locate and access resources throughout the school district, at all grade levels.* Appropriate educational opportunities should be open to all students, regardless of chronological age.

- *Maintain and use a regional listing of resources for highly gifted students.* Resources include local colleges and universities; information about the national Talent Searches and the Advanced Placement exams; psychologists and counselors with expertise in assessing and counseling highly gifted students; mentors; books, journal articles, and research about this population; advanced academic courses on the Internet; and information available via computer networks.

- *Locate supportive individuals within the school community.* Highly gifted children sometimes experience unwarranted hostility in school from both peers and educators (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993), especially in the current political climate. It is important to locate everyone within the school community who understands these children and can provide an occasional safe haven. One school secretary in a rural district kept the itinerant gifted education teacher apprised of the day-to-day social progress of a profoundly gifted boy who was adjusting to a grade skip.

- *Provide an opportunity for highly gifted students to spend time together.* These students need time with others who share their speed and complexity of thinking. Hollingworth (1942) observed the problem of play in profoundly gifted children. She noted

*(Continued on page 18)*

*Mary Lynn Baum*

# from parent to parent

## "Networking" and "The Net"

When I started thinking about this column, I didn't set out to write about the Internet. I had planned to focus on the networks we build with other parents and educators, or perhaps on how we can help our children develop their own network of friends and mentors—tangible, person to person contact.

I've always thought that there was no substitute for that kind of direct personal interaction, the kind Stella Barnes of Kelowna, B.C., vividly remembers:

*Our son got to know an older neighbour, a stand-in Grandpa, who had lived here all his life and had an endless supply of information about our area. He shared his collection of arrowheads and snakeskins, his expertise in identifying animal tracks, his rowing boat and his time. Sunday mornings with Dick were among the highlights of our son's week.*

This kind of special relationship goes beyond the information that Dick was able to share with his young protege. Much of its worth is in the human give and take, the exchange between generations, the time shared and lived together.

All the same, I've recently had the opportunity to observe first-hand the experiences of my son on the Internet, and my views have changed as a result. Whether participating in discussions on topics in his academic field through the sci.math and sci.physics news groups or relaxing with rec.games.trivia or alt.sport.baseball.tor-bluejays, there are no boundaries to the contacts he can make. The electronic network removes tell-tale signs of age. How else could a young physics student and an established cosmologist participate in the same discussion, person to person?

There are no limits to what a gifted youngster can explore, or whom she can explore it with. One can sign on to any news group and (given sufficient time and financial resources) pursue a whole range of interests. Whether a gifted youngster has an all-consuming passion for one field or an eclectic assortment of interests, electronic networks provide access to fellow enthusiasts and intellectual sparring partners. They cut across the barriers of distance and age and make it possible to establish connections that even a few years ago could not have been made.

No, I don't think there's any substitute for the kind of meaningful direct relationship that Stella Barnes writes about. It's still important to develop those networks for ourselves and to help create them for our children. At the same time, for gifted young people, so often isolated by the disparity between their age and their intellectual development, the Net can open doors and windows to a whole range of peers.

**Mary Lynn Baum**, is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, Editor since 1983 of its newsletter ***Bright Connections***, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

*THE HIGHLY GIFTED continued from page 17*

that these children

*...always wanted to organize the play into a complicated pattern, with some remote and definite climax as the goal... The playmates of ordinary intelligence naturally resented persistent efforts to reform them and to organize them for the attainment of remote goals* (p. 274).

The result is that these children have fewer playmates because of their internal developmental asynchrony. Providing opportunities for these children to be together is just as important for their social development as it is for academic challenge.

Networking is not difficult or expensive, but it is an ongoing process. It is far better to have too many resources than too few. Highly gifted children are often isolated from each other and from the resources that would help them, solely because those resources have not been scouted out. In our information age, that tragedy is avoidable.

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# ANTENNA . . . .

## *Current Developments in Gifted Education*

My phone rings, and too often it's the same story. I listen with renewed interest to a parent of a gifted child, telling another sad tale of inappropriate curriculum and unfulfilled potential, and ending with "I wish somebody would do something!"

I, too, wish somebody would do something. But who? Well, folks, there really is somebody who can do something. In fact, there are many somebodies: you and me and all the educators and parents out there who bemoan the lack of education for gifted children.

A popular media commercial demands that we *reach out and touch someone*. If we're going to ensure substantial and continuous education for our brightest students—rather than shaky programs that disappear at the beginning of each school year—we need to reach out and touch each other, our community, businesses, legislators and the general public. We must form a lasting and impenetrable network.

Networking is not a new idea; it's an idea whose time has come. In gifted education we have had advocacy groups for years. However, our message has not been unified or forceful or assertive enough to achieve appropriate and challenging education for all gifted children in every school district.

We could learn a lot about cohesiveness and the ability to bring about lasting change from the special education movement. In the 1970s, parents of handicapped children developed a strong national structure and were effective in their use of the legislative and judicial processes. Their efforts contributed to the passage of several landmark pieces of legislation, including PL 94-142, passed in 1975. This law, mandating a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped children and youth, also includes due-process procedures, least restrictive environments and individualized education programs (Meyen, 1982).

All of this could work equally well for the gifted. How about a federal mandate for the education of gifted students? We're only two decades behind special ed.

Our gifted kids, too, deserve the strongest advocacy we can provide. Reach out and join forces. Let's touch every gifted child in this nation.

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